

U.S. Special Operations Command Effectively Engaged Today, Framing the Future Fight

By PAULETTE M. RISHER

Major General Paulette M. Risher, USA, is Director, Center for Knowledge and Futures, and President, Joint Special Operations University.

Since its inception, U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) has been committed to making its role in a current or future fight a success. Conceived from the failed rescue attempt of American hostages in Iran in 1980, USSOCOM would come to exemplify the concepts of jointness and transformation before the terms became widely used.¹ From the catastrophe known as “Desert One” came a loud call for reform: a change in the nature, condition, and character of a force that needed to be interoperable across and outside the services to deal with the growing threat of low-intensity conflict. Congress and the Department of Defense (DOD) would spend several years determining the policy fixes required to improve Special Operations Forces (SOF) readiness and capability. Ultimately, those requirements would equate to a highly capable, uniquely skilled and equipped group of Active Duty and Reserve Component forces who successfully conduct Special Operations.



Deck shelter mounted on submarine USS *Philadelphia* to launch SEAL delivery vehicle while submerged

U.S. Navy (Andrew McKaskle)

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Assessing current readiness and forecasting future needs in support of national security strategy and military strategy are still command priorities. While remaining focused on maintaining its strengths in personnel and equipment for today's war, USSOCOM also realizes it must constantly seek to improve its education, training, technology, and equipment for tomorrow, and to transform to meet the future challenges of Special Operations. President George W. Bush described transformation as:

a process, not a one-time event. It's not easy because it requires balancing two sometimes conflicting priorities, the need to train and maintain our forces, to meet all our security responsibilities in the world right now, with the need to research, develop, plan, and deploy new systems and strategies that will allow us to meet our responsibilities in a much different world.²

USSOCOM recognizes those relentless issues and has dedicated personnel and resources not only to evaluate current readiness, but also to concentrate on what SOF should look like tomorrow.

A Clearly Focused Command

Established by Congress in 1987, USSOCOM was envisioned as a unified command with service-like responsibilities to oversee all Special Operations Forces. Designated responsibilities outlined in Title 10 of the United States Code included resource allocation and budget management, ostensibly to bolster special operations capabilities in such areas as joint doctrine and training, personnel management, and mission planning. The law also mandated that, should the President or Secretary of Defense direct, the commander of USSOCOM would exercise command of a selected special operations mission.³ Thus, although most of the command's effort would support the other combatant commands, under certain circumstances it could become a supported command.

In 2002, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld expanded the command's role with two additional tasks: leading planning for the war on terror, and commanding specified operations in the war.⁴ The twofold USSOCOM mission statement captures both new and old roles: "plan, direct, and execute special operations in the global war on

terrorism" as the lead combatant command, and "train and equip" SOF.

U.S. Special Operations Command is unique because it can act as a supporting or supported command, and it has its own budget authority and program objective memorandum. Its relatively small number of assigned forces (49,000) and portion of the defense budget (1.7 percent) offer a tremendous advantage: the ability to combine a service-like force provider role with a supported war-fighter role. This unmatched ability allows

officer, flag officer, or senior executive service civilian, concentrated on strategic and operational priorities relevant to its functional responsibilities.

Confronted with Secretary Rumsfeld's 2002 guidance on the war on terror and the USSOCOM role as a supported command, General Bryan "Doug" Brown, USA, the current commander, immediately began a phased realignment of his staff. It began with creating the Center for Special Operations, a joint, interagency directorate responsible

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SOF to act aggressively with speed, creativity, and boldness. Superbly equipped and trained, with the authority to develop imaginative solutions, Special Operations Forces routinely succeed in complex operational environments. Numerous missions in Operations *Enduring Freedom* and *Iraqi Freedom* illustrate SOF-unique skill sets and the force's ability to achieve objectives no one else has trained or prepared for. These longstanding characteristics of Special Operators did not appear overnight, but were the result of an organization that understood the power of looking toward future needs.

Organized for Success

The command, located in Tampa, Florida, takes pride in its ability to shape a headquarters organization to best fulfill its mission. The first commander, General James J. Lindsay, USA, organized USSOCOM along the lines of a typical unified command "J-directorate," with two modifications. He assigned budgeting and acquisition responsibilities to the J-8 (Resources) directorate and created a new J-9 (Futures) directorate to support psychological operations and civil affairs, two of the command's nine core tasks. In the late 1990s, General Peter Schoomaker, USA, eliminated the traditional J-staff alignment to focus on the command's critical role to resource Special Operations. The alignment incorporated like or complementary functions into five centers of excellence: command support; acquisition and logistics; requirements and resources; intelligence and information operations; and policy, training, and readiness. Each center, led by a general

for operational issues related to the war on terror. The next phase consolidated all intelligence, operations, and planning functions, previously performed across three different centers, into the new center. During the third phase, USSOCOM established a deployable, standing joint task force headquarters embedded in the Center for Special Operations. This action enhanced the command's ability to meet the Secretary's guidance and will provide additional capability in the command and control of SOF.

The realignments that formed the Center for Special Operations reduced or removed many of the responsibilities in two existing centers. This led to changes in functions and titles in two of the six centers. The command also supplements its center designations with subordinated J-coded directorates, improving coordination with outside agencies more familiar with a J-staff structure and functions. For example, the J-6 is under the Center for Networks and Communication. Its comprehensive mission is to implement and manage global communications and networks for USSOCOM, its components, and subordinate commands. It also ensures the reliability, interoperability, and security of command, control, communications, computer, and intelligence systems to SOF across the spectrum of conflict.

For a command with three diverse but linked priorities (the war on terror, readiness, and the future), the Center for Knowledge and Futures was conceptualized to meet current readiness and long-range transformational functions simultaneously. What used to belong primarily to the

Center for Policy, Training, and Readiness has been radically transformed. Led by a one-star general, the Center for Knowledge and Futures consists of a Directorate of Joint SOF Knowledge (J-7) and a Directorate of Futures (J-9). The J-7 directorate predominantly develops, matures, and integrates the joint SOF body of knowledge formulated from doctrine, lessons learned, training, exercises, and educational venues. The J-9 directorate leads in concept development, transformation, joint experimentation, and wargaming in order to investigate and create a compelling vision of the future of Special Operations.

Focus Areas

The Center for Knowledge and Futures focuses on five tasks that are inexorably linked to SOF readiness and the future of special operations.

Joint SOF Body of Knowledge. All professions and organizations have a body of knowledge; joint Special Operations and USSOCOM are no different. It is the J-7's responsibility to foster the interrelationships and transfer of knowledge between and among doctrine, lessons learned, education, training, and exercises. Dynamic doctrine is the framework for SOF warfighting and is where the development and sustainment of training and education programs start. It is supplemented and refined through an effective lessons learned program and renewed and delivered through a comprehensive coordination process with the Joint Staff, services, and combatant commands.

In late 2003, the command established a lessons learned program to capture and record information gleaned directly or indirectly from SOF participating in exercises or operations. The command then used a

the combination of basic and specialized military skills and knowledge Special Operations Forces require starts with intense training

remedial action program with representatives from across the headquarters centers to quickly address areas requiring investigation and resolution. In July 2004, the division activated a Web portal to provide searchable database functions. Although in its infancy compared to the services' lessons learned programs and U.S. Joint Forces Command's Joint Center for Operational Analysis and Lessons Learned (all of which supported USSOCOM developmental efforts), the command's program is increasingly contributing to readiness and transformation.

The command continues to refine and expand educational and knowledge-sharing opportunities within its own institutions, such as the Joint Special Operations University (JSOU), and throughout the joint professional military education community at large. Activated in 2000, JSOU continues its proven programs of SOF-specific curriculum development and education outreach to the

intermediate and senior service and joint academic institutions. Two examples are the U.S. Army School of Advanced Military Studies program at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and the inaugural class of the Joint Advanced Warfighting Studies program at the Joint Forces Staff College in Norfolk, Virginia. Besides its resident and mobile education teams supporting primarily Special Operations units, JSOU's newly-formed Strategic Studies division is sowing SOF strategic influence throughout the senior national, DOD, and interagency communities. Essential to this SOF virtual think tank capability is the close association of carefully selected senior fellows who research, analyze, and publish products on SOF's strategic challenges.

Joint SOF Training. The combination of basic and specialized military skills and knowledge Special Operations Forces require starts with intense training. The J-7 Training, Policy, and Validation Division oversees the multiple institutions and organizations that prepare SOF warriors. One of its core responsibilities is overseeing development, coordination, and maintenance of USSOCOM's joint mission essential task list, the Special Operations-relevant portions of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff's Joint Training System. This is essential to developing validated training courses and programs. The command foreign language program, for example, turns out hundreds of language-trained Special Operators annually, based on long-established requirements of the regional combatant commanders. In light of Operations *Enduring Freedom* and *Iraqi Freedom*, the command has revitalized its foreign language program, both to maintain the language skills regional combatant commands need and to remain flexible enough to focus language training against areas where SOF may operate.

One critical area the Training Division manages is the continuing development, improvement, and implementation of sophisticated live, virtual, and constructive simulations to better support SOF and overall joint training. Without a multidisciplinary approach to provide common operational, technical, and system architectures, such integrated simulations could not operate among those service programs that support Special Operations. The command's Database Generation System, for example, provides realistic databases to support sophisticated SOF training and rehearsal systems. Such



Marine checking communications at Udairi Range, Kuwait, during air and ground live-fire exercises

U.S. Marine Corps (Eric R. Martin)



Soldiers from Army Special Operations Command-Europe conducting static-line jump with Senegal soldiers during Exercise *Flintlock 2005* near Dakar

Fleet Combat Camera Group Atlantic (Dusan M. Ilic)

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systems are crucial to the elevated level of preparation SOF needs in the war on terror. Ongoing development and refinement of a consolidated Geospatial Intelligence Data Management process is similarly improving interoperability within SOF and DOD mission preparation, planning, training, rehearsal, and experimentation systems.

Warrior Preparation. Recognizing the tremendous potential of the Joint National Training Capability, the command actively supports U.S. Joint Forces Command in developing numerous joint training opportunities. For example, USSOCOM works actively with its service components, focusing on opportunities to align schedules and training events with their conventional deployment partners. Special Operations Forces provide their expertise in numerous exercises sponsored by the geographic combatant commanders each year. To support its role in the war on terror, USSOCOM sponsors *Able Warrior*, its own command post and field training exercise. This exercise concentrates on the rapid decisionmaking capability between headquarters, USSOCOM, the

geographic commanders, and the Joint Staff. *Able Warrior* has been approved to become part of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) Exercise Program in fiscal year 2006, and the J-7 Exercise Division is working to link it to other exercises in that program.

Strategic Planning. The vision statement—"To be the premier team of special warriors, thoroughly prepared, properly equipped, and highly motivated: at the right place, at the right time, facing the right adversary, leading the global war on terrorism, and accomplishing the strategic objectives of the United States"—shows where the command's spear is pointing. A significant part of the strategic planning process identifies the objectives where SOF future operating concepts can support this vision. The J-9 ensures that transformational considerations are debated and linked appropriately to priorities and operating concepts envisioned in SOF's future. Proof of concepts is obtained in exercises and through experimentation, concept prototyping, and wargaming. J-9 uses its own expertise and linkages outside of the command in each

of these areas to determine the right level of engagement, based on the commander's priorities and endorsement. Linking special operations concepts to JCS-sponsored exercises and experimentation, for example, provides the opportunity to amplify ideas and identify potential future capabilities and strategies.

Clearinghouse of Ideas. To maintain its effectiveness as a unique command tasked with planning the war on terror and training and equipping SOF, General Brown tasked the Futures Division to be his "clearinghouse of ideas." Its primary task is to gather and evaluate innovative ideas both from within the command and DOD and beyond—the limitless array of thinking in universities, government, science labs, think tanks, and the private sector. The Strategic Operations Working Group, for example, is a panel specifically developed to provide the commander and his senior staff alternative perspectives to areas of concern facing the command.

Since 2004, three panels have addressed operations, strategy, technology,

and scientific issues. The first, the SOF Senior Leaders Panel, included prominent retired members of the SOF community who examined command and control, authorities, logistics, and other military issues the command may confront as the war on terror evolves. A Strategists Panel convened futurists, authors, academics, and strategic thinkers attuned to the command's near- and mid-term challenges. It examined potential effects of current strategies, discussed goals in the war on terror, and analyzed ways to strengthen multilateral alliances. A third, the Scientists Panel, assembled military and civilian scientists from both the physical and behavioral sciences. These scientists, together with technologists, addressed from a scientific perspective the new paradigm spawned by the war on terror: cultural and communications issues, sensor networks, tunable weapons systems, surveillance and detection tools, data mining and link analysis, and medical enhancements for performance and endurance. Each panel has provided the commander with valuable insights.

As the military looks at potential paths to understanding and traversing future challenges, U.S. Special Operations Command continues to set the pace. "Special Operations Forces will focus on the disruption,

defeat, and destruction of terrorists and terrorism around the globe. We will ensure that we can sustain that fight indefinitely by making readiness a priority for the long term." This mission statement clearly demonstrates recognition that investment in educating and training our people and building future leaders is crucial to meeting the Nation's security commitments. Lifelong improvement of special operations personnel absolutely depends on mindful information gathering and sharing knowledge. "Humans are more important than hardware," states

the Scientists Panel addressed from a scientific perspective the new paradigm spawned by the war on terror

the first of SOF's enduring truths. It has never been more appropriate.

The mission statement continues, "While maintaining the offensive in the global war on terrorism, we will simultaneously seek to transform the command into an organization that continues to leverage every possible advantage." SOF training and exercises are undergoing constant improvements, and the command looks to the DOD Training Transformation effort as a prime opportunity to demonstrate its current level of readiness and as a place to hone or test new concepts. How to transform—how to identify and develop those capabilities SOF will need to be a useful part of the future joint team while maintaining the readiness to shape and respond to the world today—is a significant linchpin. Methodically and intentionally looking to the future through various lenses will better position USSOCOM to carry out its lead role in the war on terror and its service-like responsibilities to man, equip, and train special operations. More importantly, it will lead to SOF warriors with stronger capabilities, better warfighting concepts, and improved joint

operational skills that serve the combatant commanders and the Nation. **JFQ**

NOTES

¹ On April 24, 1980, a mission to rescue 53 American hostages was aborted at a desolate site in Iran known as "Desert One." Tragedy occurred when two aircraft collided on the ground and eight men died. The event culminated a period of SOF decline in the 1970s that was due to distrust between SOF and the conventional military and to funding cuts. Desert One led to the DOD appointment of an investigative panel chaired by the Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral James L. Holloway. See USSOCOM's History, 15th Anniversary Edition, April 16, 2002.

² George W. Bush, quoted in Department of Defense, *Strategic Plan for Transforming DOD Training, Section 1.0, "Training Transformation"* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, March 2002), 2.

³ United States Code, Title 10, Part I, Chapter 6, Section 167.

⁴ General Bryan D. Brown, testimony to the House Armed Services Committee, Terrorism, Unconventional Threats, and Capabilities Subcommittee, March 11, 2004, available at <<http://www.house.gov/hasc/openingstatementsandpressreleases/108thcongress/04-03-11brown.html>>.

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Special Forces sniper team taking aim while Ranger team waits aboard MH-6 during training exercise at Fort Bragg

U.S. Army (Jennifer J. Eidson)